

## Utopian Socialist Thought as the Foundation of Marxist Perspective

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### Abstract

*This paper demonstrates that Utopian Socialist Thought serves as the foundation for the scientific socialist theories advanced by the prominent German thinkers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The primary tenets of utopian socialist thought encompass the abolition of private property and the establishment of communal ownership of material goods and productive resources. Key Marxist texts, such as *The Communist Manifesto*, have prominently articulated the concepts of abolishing private property and establishing common ownership of natural resources and material goods. However, the foundational contributions that introduced these ideas were made by early utopian socialist thinkers, who are often overlooked in these discussions. In discussing the theory of historical dialectical materialism, there is frequent citation of Hegel's Idealism, while the long-standing Utopian Socialist concepts, such as communal ownership of property, are notably excluded. This paper examines the contributions of Utopian Socialist Thought, including the "Testament" of Jean Meslier; the concepts of "Equality Before the Law" and "Equality of Needs" proposed by French thinker Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, Morelly's Code of Nature, and the Babeufism of François Noël Babeuf, asserting their foundational role in the development of Marxist Theory of Scientific Socialist Mode of Production.*

**Key words:** *Marxism, political theory, property ownership, social thought, scientific socialism, utopian socialism*

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### Introduction

Scientific socialist discourse necessitates the examination of all intellectual evolution that transpired prior to the formulation of Marxist theories. Social theorists, primarily sociologists, economists, and political scientists, concentrate on elucidating concepts and doctrines such as struggle, materialism, historicity, surplus value theory, poverty, prosperity, revolution, property, inequality, exploitation, and transformation. In their discourse regarding these aforementioned concepts and doctrines, they predominantly reference intellectuals such as Feuerbach, Hegel, Saint-Simon, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Malthus, Immanuel Kant, Leibniz, Rousseau, Schiller, Fichte,

John Locke, and Strauss, among others (Coser, 2012). Consequently, classical thinkers including Thomas Munzer, Sir Thomas More, Tommaso Campanella, Jerrard, Winstanley, Jean Mill, Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, Morelly, and Babeuf, who formulated pivotal ideas on socialist thought, have often been eclipsed. This treatise endeavors to expound upon the contributions made by the eminent socialist thinkers.

The novel socialist paradigm in political discourse was initially championed by the renowned social and political theorists Thomas Munzer, Thomas More, Tommaso Campanella, and Jerrard Winstanley. Nevertheless, their ideas were classified as utopian socialist thought. They were deemed utopian in that the proposition for the cessation of private property and the communal ownership of resources was perceived as idealistic. However, various thinkers, including Jean Mill, Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, Morelly, and Gracchus Babeuf, persistently advanced similar socialist ideas without fatigue.

Utopian socialist thought began to take shape in the 16th century and was gradually refined throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. This very ideology served as a foundation for Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the development of Marxist theory in the 19th century. Utopian socialist thought emerged at a time when the feudal social structure prevailed but was in gradual decline (Sabirov, 1987). Concurrently, the bourgeois capitalist system was also developing. Consequently, numerous scholars regard the evolution of utopian socialist thought and the bourgeois capitalist mode of production as intertwined phenomena. In this context, the capitalist mode of production is often posited as the precursor to the socialist mode of production, while utopian socialist thought should similarly be recognized as the precursor to scientific socialist thought.

The primary contribution of Jean Meslier was the "Testament de Jean Meslier" later translated in English as "Testament of Jean Meslier", which was subsequently classified under Utopian Thought. Gabriel Bonno De Mably formulated the concept of Inalienable Rights. Morelly articulated the True Essence of Natural Law. The ideas of Babeuf were recognized as Babeufism. They envisioned a socialist paradigm and invited scholars across the globe to engage in intellectual discourse regarding socialist ideology. Utopian Socialist Thought emerged during a period when European society was transitioning into a bourgeois capitalist social system, coinciding with the parallel development of the proletariat class (Marx & Engels, 1888). This proletariat class was not only motivated to assert its own rights and privileges but also advocated for the establishment of a novel mode of production. It appeared that the working class was poised to initiate class conflict, instigate protests, and engage in discussions surrounding movements and revolutions. Consequently, Utopian Socialist Thought reaped significant benefits from the revolutionary notions espoused by the proletariat class. In this context, it can be asserted that the Socialist Thoughts of Jean Meslier, Gabriel Bonno De Mably, Morelly, and Babeuf remained vital foundational sources for the scientific socialist ideology esteemed by Marx and Engels.

## **Methodology**

In the preparation of this manuscript, various secondary resources were employed. Principal domains of the literature encompassed texts on Marxist Philosophy, social science frameworks, socialist movements, and revolutions. Consequently, the selection of the topic, formulation of the problem statement, documentation, and generalization were entirely the outcomes of a comprehensive literature review. Nevertheless, the approach adopted was inductive. Research

design was predominantly historical and descriptive. All methodologies and concepts applied throughout this manuscript are qualitative. The theoretical foundation of this paper, however, is grounded in Meslier's 'Ideal Commune', Mably's 'Inalienable Socialism', Morelly's 'Code of Nature', and Babeuf's 'Babeufism'.

## **Discussion**

Socialist theorists such as Jean Meslier, Gabriel Bonno De Mably, Morelly, and François Noël Baabyof envisioned a society wherein ordinary individuals, particularly the working class and proletariat, could extricate themselves from the exploitative capitalist mode of production and its severe oppression and exploitation. They aspired to establish an egalitarian and prosperous society grounded in natural justice that would provide happiness to its constituents. A system based on natural justice implies a framework that treats all individuals equitably, regardless of their origin or current social, cultural, economic, or any other orientation/affiliation. The shared consensus among these socialist thinkers was their collective advocacy for the abolition of private property in favor of communal ownership of available resources (Afanasyevv, 1967).

Thomas Munzar and Thomas More served as foundational figures in the evolution of Utopian Socialist Thought. Over time, other scholars followed their lead, contributing to the dissemination of their ideas and introducing a socialist mode of production. They authored numerous texts advocating for the eradication of oppression and exploitation, alongside the establishment of a new socialist production system. Subsequently, Meslier, Gabriel Bonno De Mably, Morelly, and François Noël Babeuf emerged to elaborate on the Socialist Thought initiated by Munzar and Moore. They recognized that the advent of a new socialist mode of production would only be achievable through a political revolution. Consequently, Utopian Socialist Thought began its ascent towards prominence (Sabirov, 1987). This development further inspired various socialism-oriented thinkers such as Saint Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels gleaned substantial insights from Utopian Socialist Thought, which informed the composition of *The Communist Manifesto*. This manifesto served as the seminal document for the emergence of scientific socialist thought globally (Barry, 2005). In light of these advancements, modern scientific socialist thought can be regarded as an evolved version of Utopian Socialist Thought.

## **Utopian Socialist Ideology in Influencing Contemporary Socialist Ideology**

The progression of socialist ideology has a lengthy background. Various writings were produced to highlight the inequality, injustice, and oppression generated by the feudal system of production. Academics fostered a politically aware atmosphere and a movement for equity (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018). During the course of the political movement and its pursuit of justice, a new socialist system of production, as an alternative to the feudal system of production, was envisioned. Throughout its three-century-long journey, from the 16th to the 18th century, Utopian Socialist Ideology emerged in opposition to the capitalist system of production. Consequently, the UST was, to a significant extent, fortunate in its intellectual endeavor of elucidating and examining the inequitable relationship established by the bourgeois capitalist mode of production. In this manner, the 16th to 18th centuries represented a pivotal period for the development of UST (Sabirov, 1987). It is evident in this context that UST effectively guided scientific socialist ideology.

***Jean Meslier***

Jean Meslier imparted a new perspective to UST as he formulated different schemes to eradicate social inequality by redistributing wealth and the abolition of private ownership of property. He composed a document entitled "Testament de Jean Meslier", where he clearly spoke about wise versus evil. For him, the existence of evil and God cannot go together. He aimed to safeguard this document to ensure it remained readily accessible to his adherents. Consequently, the Testament attained significant prominence in the political and philosophical realms of socialist ideology. Furthermore, this Testament introduced a novel trend in socialist thought (Cohen, 2000). His Testament invigorated revolutionary ideas in Europe, as the French Revolution transpired sixty years after his passing.

Meslier fervently criticized the prevailing feudal mode of production and the despotic monarchy of France. He assertively proclaimed that the monarchy was antiquated and lacked a moral foundation to govern. He characterized monarchy as a system that merely fosters deceit, conflict, animosity, trickery, and repression. He was opposed to private property ownership and asserted that the obsession with private property rarely permits other individuals to access any resource. This further dehumanizes individuals, transforming man into a savage being. Once captivated by private property, a man becomes the most despicable creature.

According to Meslier, the abolition of private property fosters brotherhood and mutuality. His primary focus was to establish a commune to govern the nation. A commune-based society is the optimal framework for cultivating solidarity among individuals. Only in a state where communal ownership of resources is instituted can genuine relationships between people flourish, and true equality be realized. This structure guarantees equal ownership of all resources among the populace. Private property engendered selfishness among the affluent. Wealthy individuals became deaf to the pleas of the impoverished due to the self-centeredness that accompanied their affluence. Capitalists were, in fact, the truly dependent class, unable to survive without the labor of workers. Meslier regarded religion as a myth and a betrayal (Sabirov, 1987).

Meslier sought to unveil the detrimental aspects of private property and the harm it inflicted on humanity. He presented numerous arguments advocating for the elimination of private property. He urged the populace to embrace a socialist revolution, advocating for their own emancipation. He abhorred individual hypocrisy (Gooding, 2001). He dedicated substantial effort to revitalizing the common people.

Meslier was the initial figure to define religion as a form of oppression. Thus, his struggle against religion was essentially a struggle against oppression. He endeavored to demonstrate how the struggles of individuals were intrinsically linked to material conditions. He encouraged the public to dismantle the bourgeois and feudal social systems through revolution and to establish a new socialist social order. He painted a vivid picture of revolution and urged the lower classes to combat the feudal mode of production.

***Gabriel Bonno Do Mably***

Socialist intellectual Mably significantly contributed to the enhancement of Utopian Socialist Ideology through the introduction of the "Inalienable Theory." He referenced moral narratives while formulating his ideology and explicitly asserted that the inalienable rights of individuals should never be rescinded by any entity. He was also a humanist, defining humanity as the

foundational element of any dialogue. According to Mably, a new socialist structure or organization is analogous to the human body and should be advocated for (Sabirov, 1987).

He proclaimed that, as the natural law mandates the equality of all individuals, we must also endeavor to guarantee that everyone experiences equality. Nature has bestowed this world upon all, and we are tasked with preserving this equality. No individual is deemed rich or poor, large or small, in the eyes of nature, and we must embody this principle within society. As nature excels at ensuring equality for all humans, we must also uphold equality without reservation (Sabirov, 1987).

Mably was a vehement critic of private property. He contended that societal progress could not be achieved as long as the institution of private property persists. According to Mably, equal distribution of profit cannot eliminate inequality. Therefore, the practice of private ownership should be eradicated. The trend of generating inequality should be halted. Economic inequality should not exist within human society. Private property makes people think irrationally, ultimately fostering violence and animosity among all. Inequality breeds corruption. Individuals' unneeded aspirations are amplified due to their pursuit of wealth. According to Mably, superstition arises from private property. Property instills unnecessary illusions in individuals. People drift away from reality, driven by their desire to surpass others in earnings. The affluent become wealthier while the impoverished struggle to meet basic living expenses. Thus, private ownership of resources should be terminated permanently.

Mably posited that true emancipation of individuals is achievable only within a socialist framework. He envisioned society as exclusively socialist. In his ideal society, all individuals would coexist as brothers, devoid of any divisions among them. Everyone should engage in labor, and production should be amassed in a communal store. All individuals should receive according to their needs. Mably emphasized two crucial aspects regarding the abolition of private property: all must participate actively in production, and all production should be distributed equitably.

In this manner, Mably's ideology significantly bolstered the socialist line of thought. Socialist theorists greatly benefited from Mably's Utopian Concepts.

### ***Étienne-Gabriel Morelly***

Morelly, a French philosopher, discussed the Code of Nature in which no property exists. He was a prominent critic of a contemporary unequal society, which should be transformed into an egalitarian one. According to Morelly, an egalitarian society does not require property, marriage, religion, or law enforcement. Morelly asserted that humanity experienced a golden age in the past, and that golden age should be perpetuated without delay. There was no concept of mine and thine in the past; individuals lived equally among one another. No one could contravene the Code of Nature, yet the current society was rendered unequal by the advent of private property.

He presented two arguments regarding the emergence of private property: firstly, the impersonal factor, and secondly, the material factor. The impersonal factor encompasses human irrationality or intellectual frailty, while the material factor pertains to population growth and competition among individuals for resources. Individuals were compelled to compete with each other to satisfy their needs. According to Morelly, the Code of Nature is gradually supplanted by the Code of States.

Morelly contended that lawmakers failed to comprehend the law of nature, which constituted a significant error. They did not recognize the intrinsic value of humanity and proceeded to introduce

and legitimize the private mode of production and ownership of property. Society became disastrous owing to private property, as asserted by Morelly. Concepts such as collectivity, partnership, and the natural code were among those that Morelly emphasized greatly.

Morelly proposed three types of laws to create a society conducive to human welfare. These sacred laws included; firstly, the abolition of private property and the establishment of social ownership of property; secondly, the rights to live and thrive; and thirdly, mandatory labor for sustenance according to individual capacity. He envisioned a new socialist system as a centralized economic commune, which could effectively plan and operate to uphold the principle of equality in production, exchange, and distribution (Sabirov, 1987).

Morelly followed the trajectory of earlier Utopian Socialist Thinkers, advocating for a new law that would enable individuals to produce for the benefit of humanity. In his doctrine, extravagance was prohibited, and patience among individuals was anticipated. His theory of the Code of Nature was rich with logic, rationality, natural laws, social contracts, and friendliness towards people. Consequently, Morelly is perpetually remembered for his theory of equality and justice.

### ***Francois Noel Babeuf***

Babeuf was another distinguished French socialist thinker. He was a revolutionary socialist and an accomplished journalist. His publication "The Tribune of the People" was renowned for its advocacy for the impoverished and its call for a popular uprising against the fascist regime of contemporary France. Babeuf believed that society must eradicate once and for all the ambition of individuals to become richer, wiser, or more powerful than others.

In Jacobean France, the bourgeois revolution reached its zenith. However, there were divisions and confrontations among the bourgeoisie. The upper and middle-class bourgeoisie evolved into counter-revolutionary entities after they reaped benefits from the revolution. Ultimately, they became the genuine adversary of the French revolution. Consequently, France experienced a counter-revolution, which led to the termination of the Jacobean dictatorship (Sabirov, 1987). Moreover, it facilitated Napoleon Bonaparte's establishment of an empire. Thus, comprehending the French Revolution and its implications is essential for understanding Babeuf and his ideology.

France encountered not only the Revolution but also social turmoil and conflicts. These conflicts effectively validated the assertions made by Utopian Socialist Thinkers. Following the revolution in France, a faction emerged to spearhead the new proletariat class, which aimed to initiate the proletarian revolution. However, this faction was met with resistance from the French government. Subsequently, they began campaigning against the government and promoting Utopian Socialist Thought. This movement was known as Babeufism. Babeuf's adherents commenced the formation of socialist organizations.

Babeuf was a prominent socialist thinker. He was a leader of class struggle and political activism. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, he dedicated considerable time to promoting socialist ideology. He implored individuals to dissent against the government and dismantle the French Directorate. He published the Conspiracy of Equals, which ultimately led to his arrest for committing forgery against the state, resulting in his execution.

Babeuf was the first revolutionary worldwide who not only articulated the concept of revolution and the creation of a socialist society but also diligently labored to achieve that objective

throughout his lifetime. He played a significant role in disseminating socialist literature and galvanizing the populace. As a consequence, the Marxist theory of revolution was developed. Therefore, Utopian Socialist Thinkers should be recognized as pivotal sources of Marxist Theory, Scientific Socialism, and Communism.

## **Conclusion**

Scientific socialist discourse should examine the intellectual developments prior to the emergence of Marxist theories, which this paper tried to emphasize. Because there were so many socialist thinkers continuously writing on socialist concepts like the end of private property, redistribution of resources, institutionalizing of permanent equality, etc. Despite being labeled idealistic or utopian, thinkers like Jean Meslier, Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, and Babeuf tirelessly worked to advance such socialist concepts. Utopian socialist thought evolved from the 16th through the 18th centuries, laying a foundation for Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the 19th century, to develop the theory of scientific socialism.

Thinkers such as Meslier, Mably, Morelly, and Babeuf envisioned a society free from capitalist oppression, advocating for communal ownership and fair distribution of resources. Their collective ideas were foundational for later socialist theories, influencing significant works like *The Communist Manifesto*. Utopian Socialist Ideology has a rich history focused on addressing feudal inequalities and opposing capitalism, playing a crucial role in the development of a scientific socialist thought.

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